



TESTIMONY FOR SB 445: AAC CERTAIN RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE TASK FORCE ON THE SALE OF CATS AND DOGS FROM INHUMANE ORIGINS AT CONNECTICUT PET SHOPS.

Submitted by Amy Harrell, President, CT Votes for Animals

Environment Committee Public Hearing

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I'd like to thank the Committee for raising this bill on the Task Force recommendations, and providing a public hearing. I was privileged to serve on the Task Force, co-chaired by the excellent leadership of Rep. Kupchick and Sen. Duff, and I am very glad to see that most of the recommendations have been included in this bill.

During the course of its work, the Task Force accumulated compelling evidence that there are severe problems in the pet industry and abuses at every step of the way. Connecticut pet shops use breeders with long lists of Animal Welfare Act violations, breeders they have not visited in over 4 years, and even unlicensed breeders - of over 600 out-of-state breeders a quarter of them - 150 - were not even licensed.

The pet industry desperately wants us to view this whole issue as a simple problem of there being "a few bad apples" – a few unlicensed bad breeders selling to CT pet stores. But this does not even begin to describe the real problems of our commercial puppy supply system: the only law breeders need to follow is the Animal Welfare Act, which outlines survival standards, not humane standards. The weakness of the AWA means that even the best breeders with the cleanest inspection reports can still be puppy mills, with wire flooring, no bedding, no socialization, no regular veterinary care – these are legal conditions.

What's more, the USDA's ability to regulate even these weak standards has clearly become unmanageable. A 2010 audit by the US office of inspector General found the USDA's inspection process severely lacking. And now their 120 inspectors are about to be burdened with thousands more breeders to regulate, in addition to the animals they oversee in research facilities, exhibitors, dealers, and transporters.

We are not dealing with a few bad apples, we are dealing with a system that is under-regulated, broken, exploitive, and horribly cruel. The single biggest objection I hear from pet shops on moving away from the sale of puppy mill dogs, is that they will "go out of business" but I have

yet to hear any explanation as to why these shops cannot change and adapt with the modern world, like every other profession.

I remain convinced that the only way to truly ensure that our pet shops are selling dogs from humane sources is to work toward stopping the flow of commercially-bred dogs into their shops. We can work toward this by first prohibiting *new* pet shop licensees from selling commercially-bred dogs (this was a task force recommendation, but is not included in SB 445) and secondly, phasing out the sale of commercially-bred dogs in CT's current 16 pet shops.

Stopping the flow of puppy mill dogs into pet shops is becoming a mainstream solution in this country, most recently implemented in Chicago. On March 5th their city council passed an ordinance banning the sale of not just commercially-bred dogs, but cats and rabbits as well. And while CT advocates have proposed a 5-year grace period, Chicago only allowed one year. Chicago even has more pet shops per person than Connecticut does, and yet the ordinance passed by a vote of 49 to 1. (please see language attached)

I am not anti-puppy, anti-pet store, or anti-choice. What I am proposing is that it is time we fully acknowledge and take action against the cruelty that is rampant in the pet industry. I am asking that we move away from the outdated and exploitive model of manufacturing pets like commodities and shipping them out for sale in the retail market.

Dogs are living feeling creatures, they are not cookware or TV sets.

I am asking for passage of legislation that recognizes that the citizens of Connecticut strongly object to having businesses in our state profiting at the expense of innocent lives. Please add to SB 445 the grandfathering provision from the task force recommendations, and also a provision to phase-out the sale of commercially-bred dogs in our current pet shops.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify today.